SMOKE

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SMOKE

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POEMS BY

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The unfinished

Man in his generation
with a coming and a going
is neither soul nor nation,
sorrow nor sowing,

is neither proof nor plenty,
flower or sod.
He rises out of heat and chance
and fights against his God.

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Summary

The idle lowlands, where the endless herd
ambles through grass the idle, aimless day
knee-deep in the mild hours — where the bird
that lives on grain and comfort knows its way
homeward at evening clear of any harm —
where the unconscious sheep, the portly hen
turns in the empty quiet of the farm
to sleep and eat and eat and sleep again,

or where the sunset startles half the sky,
the mountains step into a harder air,
the torrent breaks the rock and plunging by
sees the pale mountain lion in her lair,
where the unalterable course of change
broods and creates before it starts to sing,
where planets and sidereal systems range
and build a place for the eagle on the wing!

Wild Bird

The hawk climbed up into a harder air.
His ranging eye
taught him the place to strike that he might live
though others die.

He sought security within the storm
and asked no more
than on a driven wind to fight and turn
and die as other hawks had died before.

First love

Who is this that comes — on such a night as this —
and upon the hills are feet as swift as is love
descending into places where both the paths can meet,
where the hands can kiss,
— no fears, no ills —
only the dark, untrodden way of delight
and the high air that surrounds an early love
and the heart in its faltering beat.

Who is this that comes — on a portentous wind —
there is darkness behind and about him, and before
only descending paths where at the river's brink
the night goes seeking its kind,
— no doubts, no fears —
and the warm dusk and the burgeoning heart are one
and the path and the hands and the places meet as before
and a brooding bird gives a soft cry when the waters rise and sink.

Of earthly love

For I have read
in the long poems written long ago by men and women writing of their love
that time might go
like a breath blowing in the night
and they be dead
but still their love would beacon like Warwick Light.

It is not so.

The illumination's done
that lit the fondest ship its phantom way,
the lighthouse has been ruined and the rock on which it stood has crumbled
quite away,
the flesh that once was warm at last has kept — hidden from the eye of the
impartial sun —
its bodily faith, and here tonight has slepped
where love, all love, is done.

Insatiate longing, let it be enough
to have been briefly of immortal stuff.

Time was

He is going to look for a quiet sleep,
in a quiet place he is going to lie,
he will dream a quiet dream and a tide
will overflow the dream that will keep him,

roll under, about, and wrap him in,
and engulf and embed and compose and restrain.
Once he was tossed on a tide of pain.
Once he was lapped in the sexual sin.

Message to my children

Let none tell you that indifference is strength. When I have left you
for that star
that may be mine only because it is distant, let none tell you that sterility
of thought, emotion, action can be life. Life's not compounded from such
tasteless food.
It is the sparkle in the brimming cup. I have known it.
Read these words and think of me,

and think of sunlight in the early elm by Narragansett's restless, happy tide
unlike Sorrentian waters where the night is as mysterious as a woman's mood,
think of those southern reaches and horizons where the doradé leap,
of Pennsylvania in her melting Fall when every breath is good

and think of Paris where the walls are dove-like and water cools the eye,
of Munich and of music and of men who scale that sounding height
and of October and New York where day is wider than the sky,
of home, where a contentment can come down and crown the careful within
a fading light

and think of duty as the fire that makes the molten man a man of metal too,
of those vast efforts that the single heart compels itself to, even though it break.
Think that the night of effort and of stars has one result within eternity,
that soil and space and season have been shaped for you.
Know this.
And think of me.

A decade

This was a watch in the night,
this was a burden we bore
through a dull hour that crept into a dawn
unlike the early red we knew before.

It held no promise of a larger air,
the sky hung low
and the resentful clouds came down upon us.
There was no place to go

where shoestrings can be loosened,
or where light
fulfils an arid shore.
This was the burden we bore,
this was a watch —— in the night ——

Insomnia and age

When this corruption lies within the night and turns and looks and sees
the shadow of corruption moving in and out amongst the trees,
watches the fireflies of bolder days go candlelighting by,
the little stars that make the Milky Way traveling a meaner sky,
when this corruption looking for release from the unfaithful breath
turns in the darkness that is hot and strange and hungry, like the death,
when this corruption can not put it off, what is corrupt and old,
but must endure the spirit as the flesh, the heat like the cold,
the twisted hours confusing in the mind truth and untruth,
where then is the long time,
the deep
unwinking
sleep
of my youth!

The unknown soldier

I

The sudden flags that hang in the crowded street,
the anxious crowds passing on anxious feet,
the passing tread to the drums, the passing sweat
in the still summer's heat.

The bugle calls beneath a sunset sky,
(I am calling them out,
I am calling them out,
to die.)
Yesterday the path was plain, but today
there is a cloud that has gathered. We can not tell why.

And within the dark of the moving, implacable station
the faces of women bidding goodbye to a nation,
the faces of girls lit by a light or a passion,
tonight the face of the old or the young devotion.

Tomorrow the caissons upon the dusty roads,
they are rolling along and they carry their dusty loads
soon to be dust in the service of intimate gods,
shot down in the little field near the foreign woods.

And among the shadows another, a stern young face.
(This is not victory, this is only a race
between two runners, this is only a choice,
this has a share in my knowledge of time and place,

this is a hope that passes by the breath,
this is a certainty that exceeds belief
or self, this is the endeavour beyond faith.
I have known it. Worth, at the last, any death.)

There was a bitter wind

II

There was a bitter wind that blew in spring
and had no confines, but a breath of snow
grew in it. It was black with early fears
that (how unlike yourself) refused to go.

All else went swiftly. Sorrow shaped the hour,
a barren trail was worked by women's tears.
Still through an august night the same winds blow.
(We have known the dead so well so many years.)

Military Parade-1933

III

Let the parade pass on. Let the burial ground
be a meeting-place for both the quick and the dead,
let the corpse ride,
the bugle sound,
where is the face, the face on which light once was shed,
where is the spirit that lifted and struggled and tried,
or the hand that pointed toward a rising sun?
It is only an empty soil in a foreign land
that when it was first begun
had an immortal grasp of mortal things
but only a mortal strength
to carry the pack and meet the bullet and round
the hottest hill at length.
Where is that young boy's face
that smiled when it told how quickly it would find
a resting place?
It is only a trowelful of clay.
Let the parade pass on.
There rides with the riders today
many an unknown soldier, thin, insubstantial, unseen,
whom the fortunes of war have tried
nor have these been found wanting.
They remain
of that selected company
that knew what it was fighting for
nor raised a banner out of ignorance
and out of folly learned to worship war.

SMOKE

Rather this band
to which has been denied
the fulfillment of life beneath a friendly sky,
the conclusion of love,
the contentment of age,
rather this band
read on an antique page
some story where honour and death were early at one
and raised the eyes from the page
and put the volume down
and moved awhile and was gone.
These were they whose souls were accoutred with wings
which only the visionary eye descried
against the back-drop of our painted stage
that the Great Carpenter shall at last displace,
returning to its first and secret place
with other secret and ineffable things,
like man
and moon
and sun.
We that have grown old since that different day, pausing to watch
the quick and the dead astride,
will take the salute for the wisdom that has died
and watch the parade pass on.

Tale of two cities

What though Timgad stands broken in a valley of dried bones
where the sheep feed between the showers and the cattle between the stones
and the ruts of carts a thousand years on the rubbish heap are the runes

that old men on winter nights read to us for a sign
of the hopes cooling in other clay beneath a ledge of time,
of the vanishing into pale air of other more singular tunes,

yet taller towers that top as hard a sky find their way up again
and notes composed more variously are shaped for various men
today, and the old thing fertilises the new and has not existed in vain

and has not piled effort on effort and stone upon stone
for a dream, or a pale wind, or an hour. For a bone.
Men in their efforts and their dreams since first they dreamed have been one.

New York City

The watercarts freshened the early streets at seven,
in the Cathedral women arose knowing their errors forgiven
and the men with pale faces and dark paunches rolled in to work at eleven.

The day moved on to the warmer hour of one,
labour was laid aside and duties were left undone
and the foolish fought their way to food and fought their way on.

At three the pavements were tepid in the heat.
At four the policeman on the beat loosened his collar a bit.
At five the turmoil of workers rang through the cavernous street.

At six a faint breath of air blew up and down
the breathless blocks of the dirty summer town
and spent itself like a swimmer who struggles but knows he must drown

and at seven there bloomed out of day an enchanted dusk
and the peaks of the city were lost in the darkening west
and youth wandered the streets once more, and once again it was pleased

and grasped as in Babylon the old contentment,
as in Pompeii the one, the ancient discernment,
and in New York at night is again the eventful, the slow enchantment.

Written for the blessed Catherine

Is the human heart ever broken to no effect?
It is only hard hearts that are broken.

Turn away from your hardness, oh, human heart,
and live in the wisdom that the saints have spoken

of how all things are one since time was concerned
and the heart and the hope range on into eternity

where they meet in that effort
since God is in man and man is in God
(said the Siennese saint,) as the sea is in the fish and the
fish is in the sea.

Surveying the dust

There is nothing here to learn.
All was taught me long ago
By the water's rush and churn
By the beating of the prow,

By the springing of the ship
Through a moving world.
In spite
of the sleeper in the ground,
or of time's essential flight.

Rockgarden

Here I will plot a garden plot
where the night will be cool and the sun will be hot
and I can rest and be forgotten,

and here the peacock will dust his train
and come and call through the dark again
and believe that he goes adventuring

while in a corner an orange persimmon
will flourish like the cedar of Lebanon
and a warm white cat will take a sunning

and my good and my garden will grow like the day
and the cat and the peacock will saunter and play
until I
    and the rock
        and the garden
            and the cat and the peacock
and all things (except goodness itself) shall crumble away.

Oh, kindly death

Oh, kindly death,
those that go on in fright
and dread to face
the certainty of your night

that would live out
a thousand ages still,
that never know
how to obtain their fill

of life, and do their work,
and lay it down,
and turn to you
and turn to you alone

from the surcease
of beating heart and breath,
how little have they learned,
Oh, kindly death!

In our previous issue (Autumn, 1934) we were mistaken in noting that the poem BUDDING was written by Robert England, editor of the *Westminster Magazine*. Mr. England has informed us that BUDDING was written by WALTER BENTON, of Warren, Ohio. Mr. Benton has had poems accepted by *Harper's*, the *American Poetry Journal*, and *Poetry*.

The poems by Susanna Valentine Mitchell printed in this issue of SMOKE will be included in a volume, *Journey taken by a woman*, to be published by Farrar and Rinehart of New York at the end of February.